

**Tennessee's Prioritization Framework for the
2022-2032 Vision for the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Program**

**Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation
Division of Water Resources
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Tennessee's Prioritization Framework (Framework) for the 2022-2032 Vision for the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) outlines the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation's (TDEC, or the Department) plans to prioritize and implement measures of restoration and protection through our Section 303(d) Program.

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

2013 Vision – In 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began working with the states to develop a new vision for attaining water quality restoration and protection. As a result of this collaboration, in December of 2013, the EPA announced a framework for states to implement the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 303(d) program. This framework was the foundation for a long-term vision for assessment, restoration, and protection.

Tennessee began to approach this vision by drafting a prioritization framework which addressed watersheds that contained both nutrient impaired waters and source water protection areas. Over the last ten years, Tennessee has incorporated a protection approach to the TMDL development process, engaged stakeholders into the TMDL development process, developed tools to better engage the public, worked to better integrate the TMDL program with other clean water act programs and developed several alternative restoration approach documents to support the goals of this program.

2022-Vision – As the 2013 Vision began to come to a close, EPA continued to collaborate with the states to assess the success of the 2013 Vision and to refine it for the future. Goals for prioritizing 303(d) programs were expanded to include consideration of Environmental Justice and Climate Change in states' processes with an emphasis on partnerships and engagement as an important component to successfully affecting improvements in restoration and protection of our Nation's water resources.

In 2021, Tennessee began the process of developing a revised priority framework to help reach the overall goals of the 303(d) program and the new 2022 Vision. Tennessee's Framework uses an adaptive, hybrid approach that includes TMDL development priorities and Advanced Restoration Plan priorities. Tennessee's priorities aim to meet the state's overall water quality goals while establishing long term partnerships that will further our ability to restore and protect the waters of the state as well as keeping focus on the importance of environmental justice and consideration for changing climate conditions.

Tennessee will strive to revisit prioritization efforts periodically in order to maintain consistency with TDEC's policies and priorities, as well as EPA national and regional priorities.

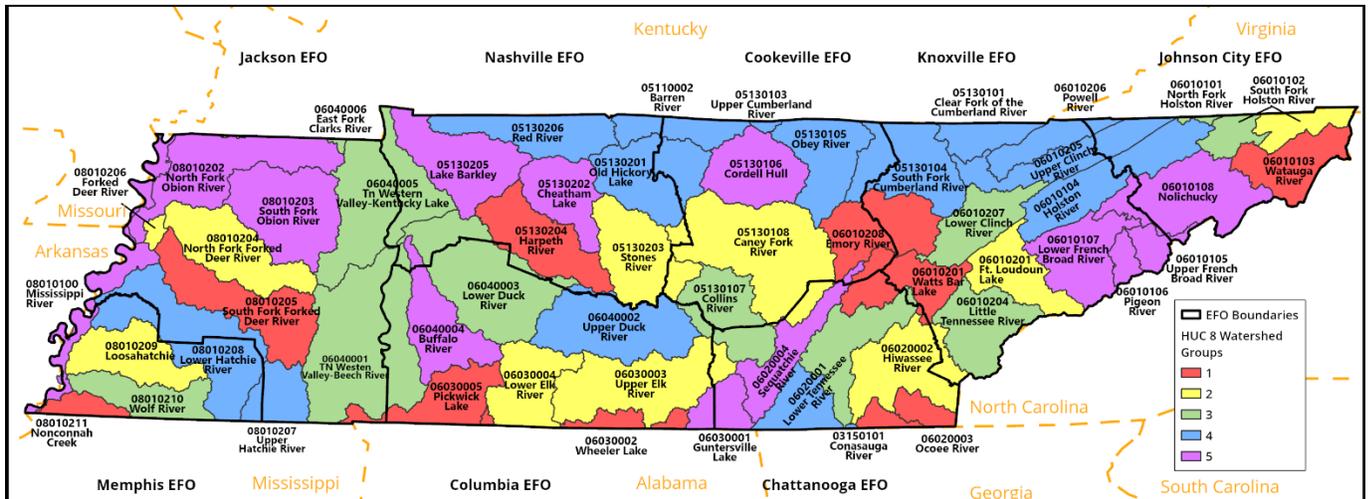
PLANNING AND PRIORITIZATION GOAL

“States, territories, and tribes develop a holistic strategy for implementation of Vision Goals, systematically prioritize waters or watersheds for TMDL and other plan development (restoration and/or protection), and report on the progress towards development of plans for priority waters.”

Tennessee continues to use a watershed approach in a five-year recurring cycle to identify and prioritize water quality challenges, promote public involvement, coordinate activities with other agencies, and measure success through monitoring and other data gathering.



Tennessee's Watershed Cycle



Tennessee's Watershed Management Groups in 2023

While utilizing this ongoing rotating watershed approach, Tennessee's adaptive prioritization will continue to consider additional opportunities for collaboration, protection, and restoration in support of the goal of improved water quality in Tennessee. Every two years, Tennessee's commitments will be revisited to take into consideration any new statewide concerns, programs, departmental priorities and/or considerations for underserved communities and statewide environmental justice initiatives.

RESTORATION GOAL

"States, territories, and tribes design TMDLs and other restoration plans to attain and maintain water quality standards, facilitate effective implementation, and drive restoration of impaired waters."

TMDLS

One mechanism that Tennessee uses to establish restoration goals for impaired waters is through specialized reports known as total maximum daily loads (TMDL). The TMDL is a quantitative determination of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive and still meet water quality standards.

During this Vision 22 period, Tennessee will initially be drafting a TMDL for *E. coli* in the Lower Tennessee River Watershed in southern middle Tennessee. This TMDL will be addressing 51 impaired segments in the watershed.

In addition to the above mentioned TMDL, Tennessee will be using the watershed cycle to prioritize revisiting all past *E. coli* TMDLs to revise them with the new assessments and new criteria that is currently being proposed.

Advanced Restoration Plans

Another mechanism that Tennessee is beginning to explore is to establish restoration goals for impaired waters through the Advance Restoration Planning (ARP) process. This type of planning and document development can be used in cases where restoration approaches may provide a more immediately beneficial or practicable path to restore water quality. While plans may differ based on the issues being addressed, for each project, Tennessee will develop a draft document to identify the impaired waters to be addressed, inventory activities that have been or are being done to address water quality issues, potential partners in the watershed and future plans for implementation and monitoring of activities and improvements to water quality.

For Vision 2022, Tennessee has prioritized four primary ARP projects.

Advanced Restoration Plan

Target: 10.2 Miles Impaired segment of West Fork Red River
 HUC 12: 051302060604
 Focus: Sediment and Habitat Alteration
 Partners: Cumberland River Compact, local community, partner agencies

Advanced Restoration Plan

Target: 11.6 Miles Impaired segment of Unnamed Tributary to Wolf River
 HUC 12: 080102100302
 Focus: Habitat Alteration
 Partners: Civil and Environmental Consultants through Mitigation Project, local community, partner agencies

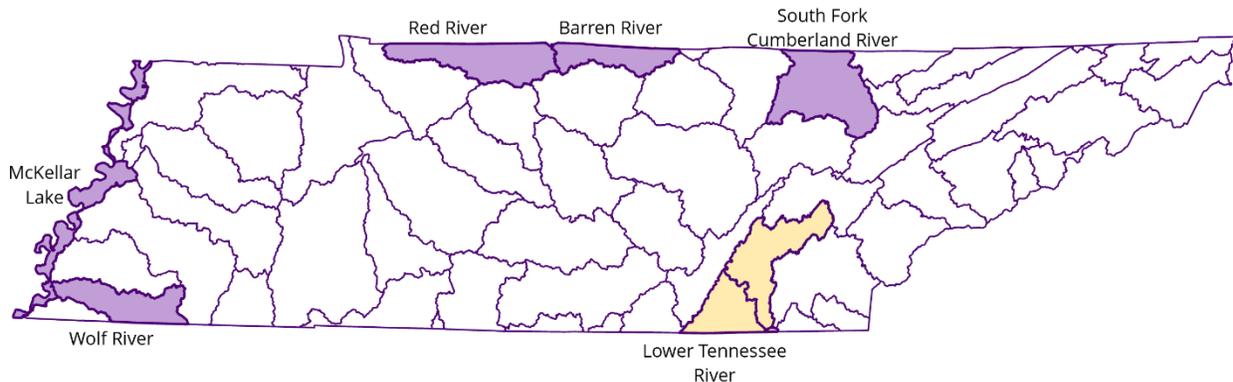
Planning for Stakeholder Engaged Development of Advanced Restoration Plans

Advance Restoration Plan

Target: South Fork Cumberland River Watershed
 HUC 8: 05130104
 Focus: Additional monitoring, protection priority, evaluation of water quality, protection of high-quality waters
 Partners: Local community, parks, partner agencies

Advanced Restoration Plan

Target: McKellar Lake Watershed (Mississippi River Watershed)
 HUC 8: 05010100 (several sub watersheds within)
 Focus: Additional monitoring, evaluation of pollutants & inundation of Trash
 Partners: Local community, local municipalities



PROTECTION GOAL

"In addition to recognizing the protection benefits that TMDLs and other restoration plans can provide, states, territories, and tribes may develop protection plans to prevent impairments and improve water quality, as part of a holistic watershed approach."

When Tennessee develops a TMDL report, waterbodies that are located within impaired drainage areas, but are not currently listed as impaired, are evaluated for protection. TMDLs and allocations are developed for these unimpaired (fully supporting) and unassessed waterbodies in order to maintain good water quality and to maximize the likelihood of each protection waterbody meeting water quality standards in the future.

For the Lower Tennessee River Watershed TMDL, there will be 24 segments evaluated for protection.

Additionally, as Tennessee develops Advanced Restoration Plans, the plans will include a component of protection of unimpaired waters that may be at risk of degradation. This may be in the form of state processes of land management and/or in the form of engaging and assisting local cities, counties and/or stakeholders in processes that are proactive in protecting their communities and resources.

DATA AND ANALYSIS GOAL

"The CWA Section 303(d) program coordinates with other government and non-governmental stakeholders to facilitate data production and sharing, and effectively analyzes data and information necessary to fulfill its multiple functions."

Tennessee will continue the ongoing process of connecting with possible partners, discovering data sets that are available and identifying gaps in the data. Tennessee will be gathering data from agencies and stakeholders through the ARP process and will be working through assessment methodology and 303d listing, to better coordinate with other data providers.

PARTNERSHIPS GOAL

"The CWA Section 303(d) program meaningfully communicates and collaborates with other government programs and non-governmental stakeholders to restore and protect water quality effectively and sustainably."

Tennessee continually strives to identify and coordinate not only with partners throughout the state, but also with partners in neighboring states that share water resources. Collaboration and coordination with partners is essential for Tennessee to make progress in meeting goals for water quality and resource protection.

Kentucky-Tennessee Partnership

Tennessee and Kentucky have initiated the process to coordinate efforts to identify and achieve shared goals for two watersheds in northern Tennessee.

1. Red River Watershed (HUC8-05130206)
2. Barren River Watershed (HUC8-05110002)

Tennessee plans to work with Kentucky to align programmatic priorities and activities that support both states' goals to protect healthy waters and to achieve water quality goals for impaired waters. Through this partnership, Tennessee hopes to achieve progress in nutrient reduction through Advanced Restoration Planning in these target watersheds. This process will also lay the foundation and structure for similar coordination in other shared watersheds.

Stakeholder Engagement

Tennessee will continue to regularly coordinate with stakeholders through several different avenues.

Tennessee maintains a website and several social media accounts to maintain consistent connection to stakeholders. This allows Tennessee to keep stakeholders apprised of ongoing activities within the state, documents available for review, available programs and regulatory information such as permits being proposed or changes to rules. Tennessee will continue to use these avenues to communicate priorities under the Vision.

Tennessee utilizes a public participation process which allows stakeholders to review and make comment on proposed permits or documents. This process often includes public meetings and/or hearings designed to further inform the public on proposed actions and to gather comments and concerns. Tennessee will share this Framework with the public through this process.

Tennessee also engages stakeholders in the TMDL development process and Advanced Restoration Plan development as appropriate. Including stakeholders during the development process can add insight into the local area and offer connections that the department might not have. Even through a stakeholder driven process, the development of the TMDL or the development of an Advanced Restoration Plan is still the state's responsibility and will be submitted to EPA by the state.

Tennessee will utilize TDEC's Office of External Affairs throughout various processes to optimize engagement with external stakeholders regarding water quality concerns across the state. The Regional Directors on this team have established relationships with and actively work with local and state officials; business and industry; the general public; community development representatives; and environmental groups. This can provide a valuable additional point of contact for water quality activities. This team assists with coordinating and facilitating public meetings, regulatory hearings, information sessions, and community engagement opportunities.

This Framework document will be made available to the public for review and comment along with the state's Draft List of Impaired and Threatened Waters, will be available on the TDEC website, and will be presented at a public hearing on January 16, 2024.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This Framework, and any revisions will remain on TDEC's website for the duration of the Vision period.

Questions and comments may be directed to:

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Tools / Associated Links:

[EPA's EJ Screen](#)

[EPA's Recovery Potential Screening Tool](#)

[USGS' SPARROW](#)

[EPA's How's My Waterway](#)

[EPA's ATTAINS](#)

[Distressed Counties in Tennessee](#)

[Division of Water Resources Public Participation Opportunities](#)